
The Great Procession

verses for and about Children

Harriet Prescott Spofford



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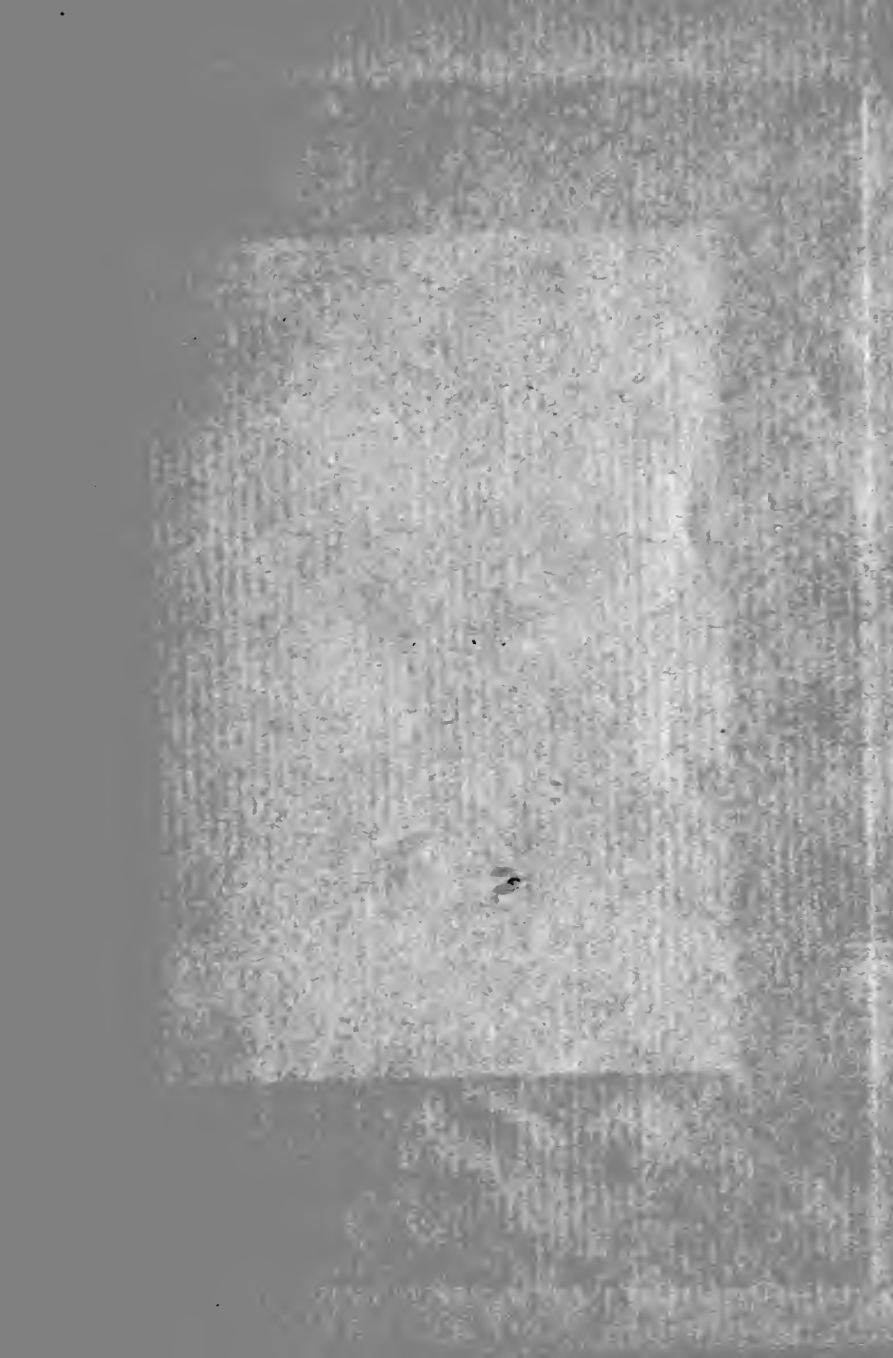


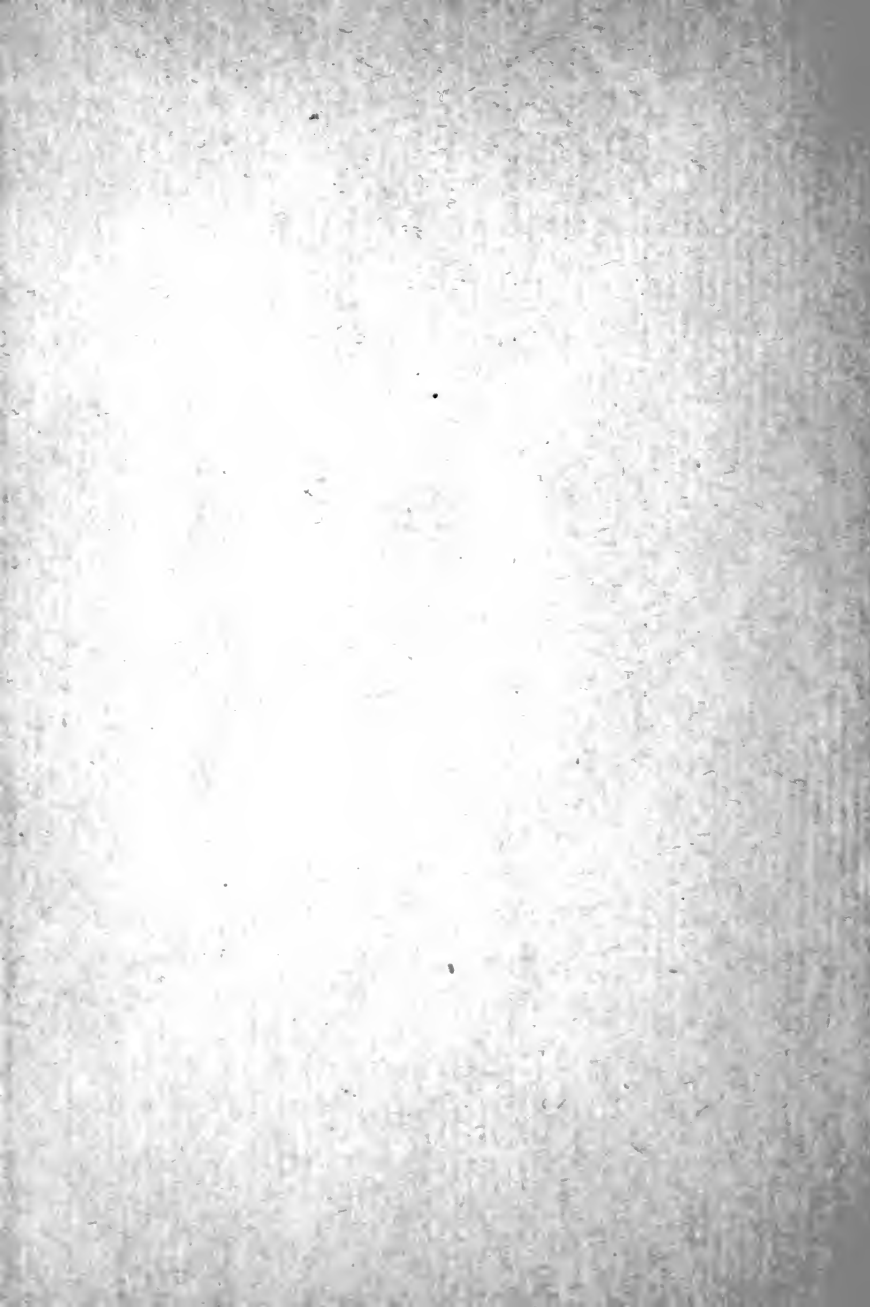
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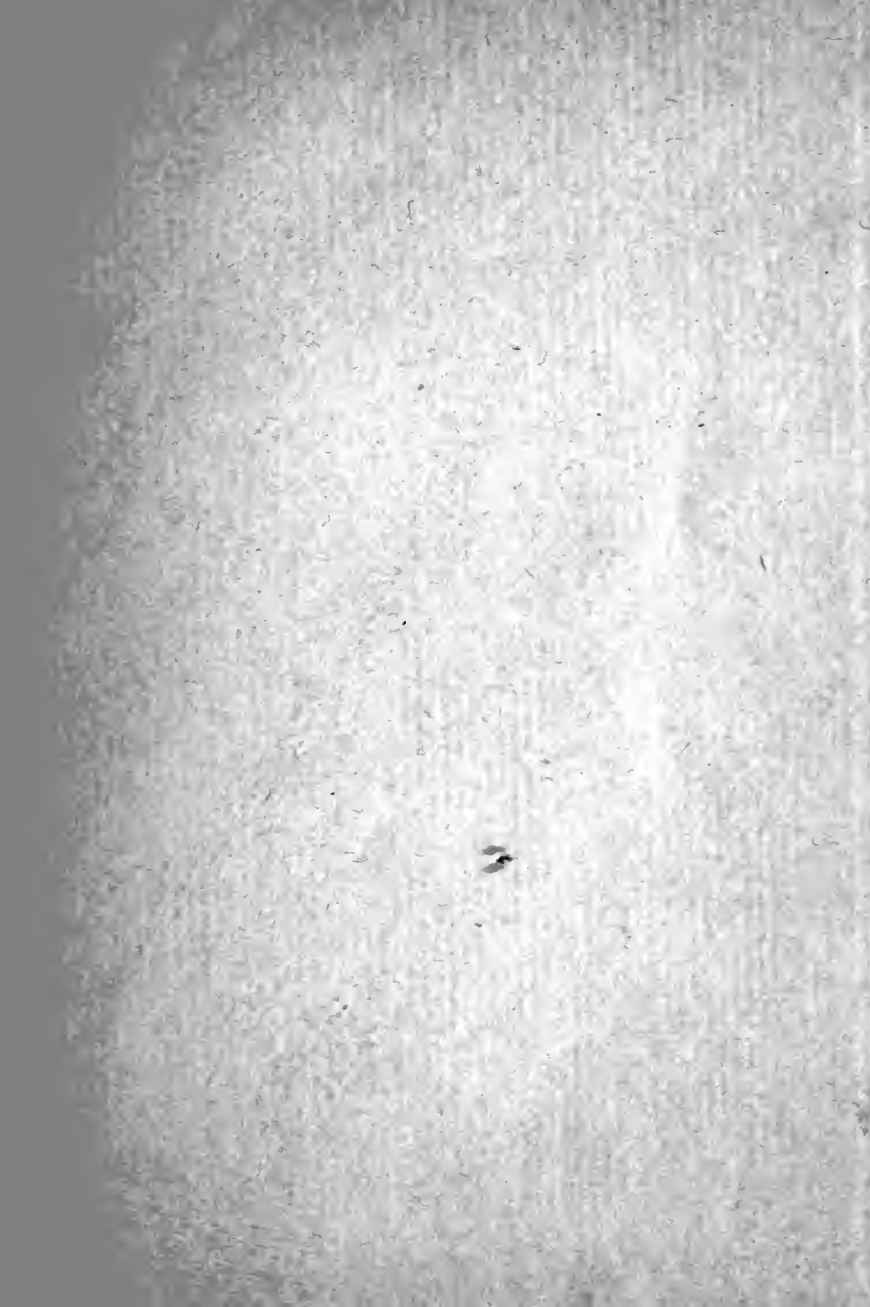
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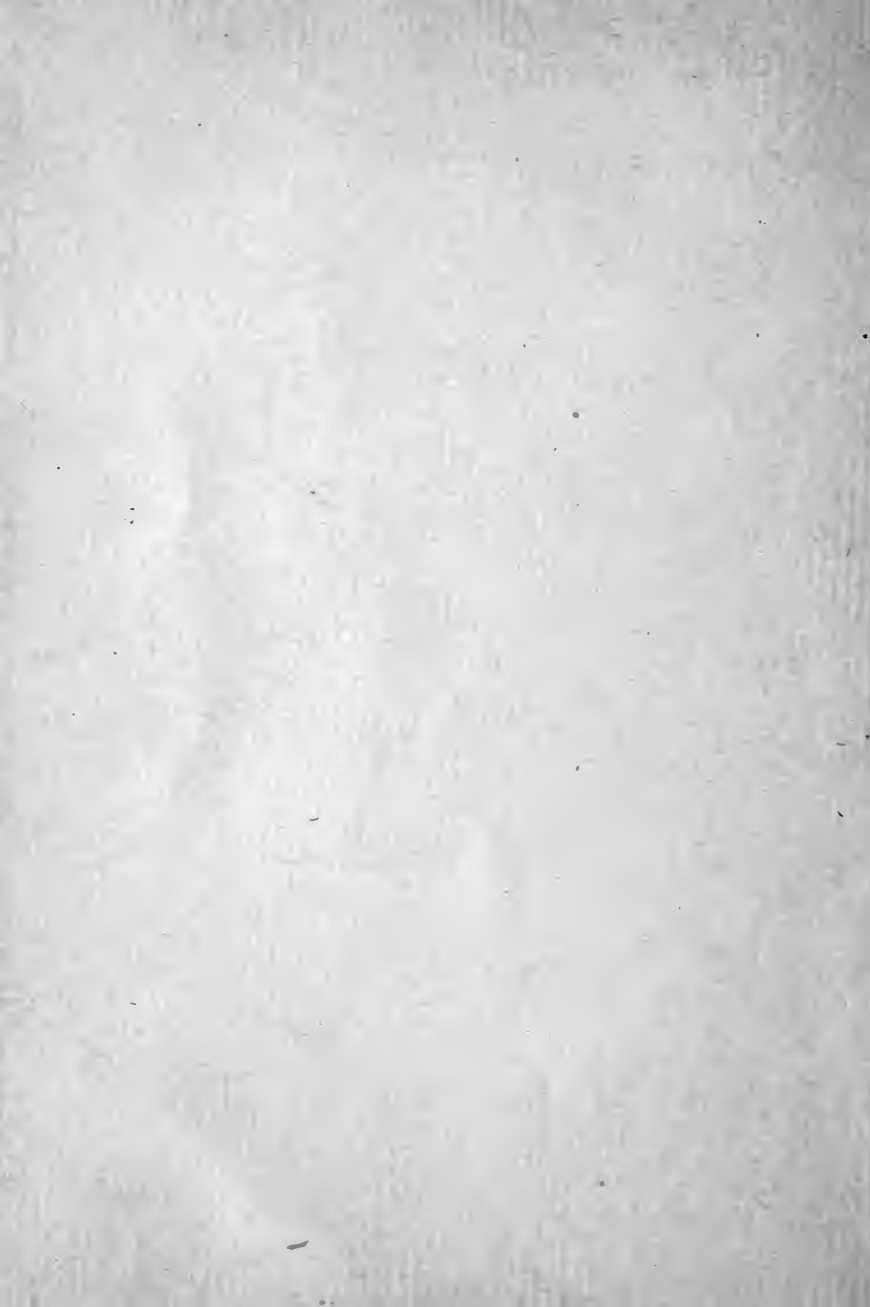
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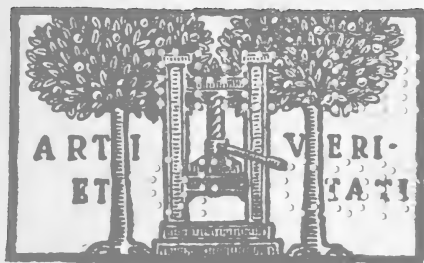
THE GREAT PROCESSION



The Great Procession and other Verses for and about Children

Harriet Prescott Spofford

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The Gorham Press

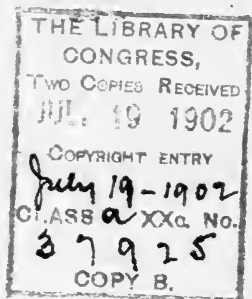
Richard G. Badger

Boston

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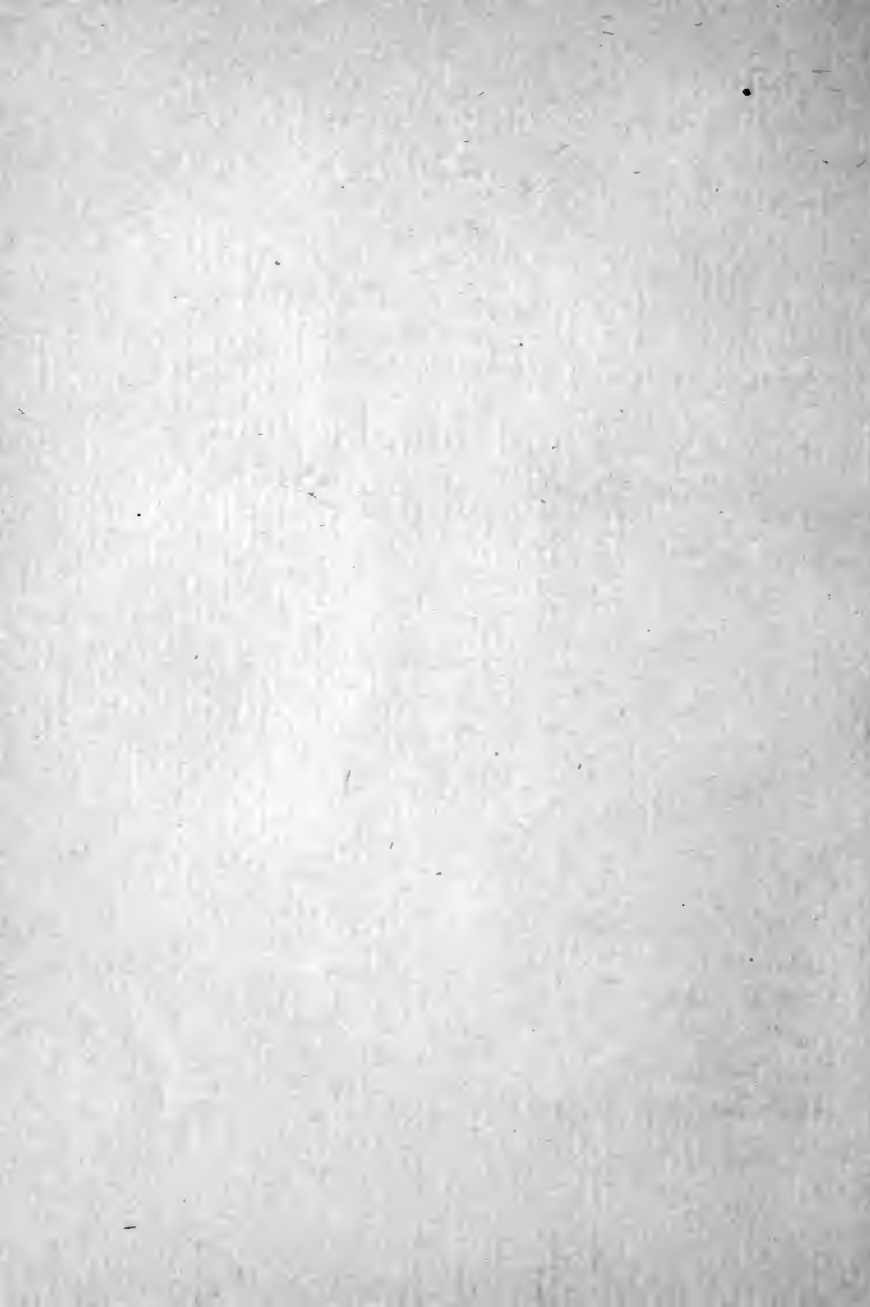
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The Gorham Press, Boston

*Something to live for came to the place,
Something to die for, maybe,
Something to give even sorrow a grace—
And yet it was only a baby!*

*Cooing and laughter and gurgles and cries,
Dimples for tenderest kisses,
Chaos of hopes and of raptures and sighs,
Chaos of fears and of blisses.*

*Last year, like all years, the rose and the thorn:
This year a wilderness, maybe;
But heaven stooped under the roof on the morn
That it brought there only a baby.*



CONTENTS

The Great Procession, 9
The Cradles, 12
The Amber Bead, 14
Among the Stars, 16
The Little Irish Girl, 17
A Legend, 21
A Promise, 23
The King's Dust, 24
Little January, 25
The Forerunner, 27
Our Maying, 29
A Fishing Trip, 30
Sma' Folk, 32
Her Horoscope, 34
The Fourth of July, 37
Flag Song, 41
The Problem, 43
The Reason Why, 44
An Apparition, 45
Me, 46
Love, 47
Under Green Boughs, 48
One's Will, 49
Next the Head, 50
Thanks, 52
Two Generations, 53
What One Boy Thinks, 54

Fern Seed, 57
A Bicycle Song, 58
On the Trolley, 59
The Gingerbread Vine, 60
The School Mistress, 62
The Lazy Hour, 63
The Bells of September, 64
The Fairy of Early Fall, 65
In Nutting Time, 66
Puss, 67
The Solemn Truth, 69
The Malison, 73
The Child that Gave Trouble, 74
Her Wings, 76
The Witch Dance, 79
The Land of Story Books, 81
The Thanksgiving Tree, 83
A Strange Country, 85
In Icy Weather, 87
The Snow Flurry, 88
Jo's Toboggan, 89
The Yule Log's Song, 90
A Christmas Story, 95
Christmas Cheer, 97
A Christmas Lullaby, 99
The Fossil Raindrops, 100
Wings, 102
Birds and Bonnets, 103
In an Old Garden, 107

THE GREAT PROCESSION

Did you ever happen to think, when dark
Lights up the lamps outside the pane,
And you look through the glass on that wonder-
land

Where the witches are making their tea in the
rain,

Of the great procession that says its prayers
All the world over, and climbs the stairs,
And goes to a wonderland of dreams,
Where nothing at all is just what it seems?

All the world over at eight o'clock,
Sad and sorrowful, glad and gay,
These with their eyes as bright as dawn,
Those almost asleep on the way,
This one capering, that one cross,
Plaited tresses, or curling floss,
Slowly the long procession streams
Up to the wonderland of dreams.

Far in the islands of the sea
The great procession takes up its way,
Where, throwing their faded flower-wreaths
down,
Little savages tire of play;

Though they have no stairs to climb at all,
And go to sleep wherever they fall,
By the sea's soft song and the star's soft gleams
They are off to the wonderland of dreams.

Then the almond lids of the Tartar boy
Droop like a leaf at close of day;
And her mat is pleasant as clouds of down
To the tawny child of the Himalay;
And the lad on the housetop at Ispahan
Sees night, while the rose-breaths around him
fan,
Lead up from the desert his starry teams
And mount to the wonderland of dreams.

Still westward the gentle shadow steals,
And touches the head of the Russian maid,
And the Vikings' sons leave wrestle and leap,
And Gretchen loosens her yellow braid,
And Bess and Arthur follow along,
And sweet Mavourneen at even-song,
All mingling the morrow's hopes and schemes
With those of the wonderland of dreams.

The round world over, with dark and dew,
See how the great procession swells;
Hear the music to which it moves,
The children's prayers and the evening bells,

It climbs the slopes of the far Azores,
At last it reaches our western shores,
And where can it go at these extremes
But into the wonderland of dreams?

Hurrying, scampering, lingering, slow,
Ah, what a patter of little feet!
Eyelids heavy as flowers with bees,
Was ever anything half so sweet?
Out of the tender evening blue—
I do believe it has come for you
To be off to the wonderland of dreams,
Where nothing at all is just what it seems!

THE CRADLES

I

Lapped in the eider, and wrapped in the silk,
A cherub watching her beautiful rest,
Carven from ivory white as milk,
The little princess lies in her nest;
And the upstretched wings hold the drift of lace
That floats like a cloud round the flower-sweet
face,
While jeweled ladies wave to and fro
Great plumes that perfume the winds they blow.

II

Folded in fleece, and swinging aloft
In the rough-rolled sheet of hemlock bark,
The pioneer baby sleeps as soft,
Though round her the forest frowns vast and
dark,
Where the axe rings clear and the bird sings
high,
And the beast with a crash is leaping by,
And the shaft of sunshine comes and goes,
And the wild bee fancies her cheek a rose.

III

Long, long ago, in the misty gleam
Of that elder day where the ways divide,
Their little ancestress dreamed her dream
By the spear-heads' glow and the camp-fire's side,
While the blood of battle across the night
Yet sang of the awful joys of fight,
And with all its dints of fray and field,
One rocked her to sleep in her father's shield.

THE AMBER BEAD

I am only a bit of amber
That dazzles the baby's eyes;
But the light in my innermost chamber
Is the light of the pristine skies.

For ages ago, and ages,
When, far in the upper air,
Vast firs, like old archimages,
Shed incense everywhere,

And, all in the wide gray weather
Which wrapped the whole round world,
Solemnly waved together
As the thick warm vapors curled,

In the sunshine's sudden bursting
I oozed from a topmost bough,
And I drank that splendor thirsting,—
There is no such sunshine now!

And the wings that came round me flashing,—
None like them are fluttering here,—
I caught in my heavy plashing
And sealed in my shining sphere.

Oh, life that was wild and glorious
When the elements wrought for man,
And wave over fire victorious
Shaped the earth to her ancient plan!

Then the tides, in the great world-changes,
Rose in their mighty turn,
Rolled over the fir-tree's ranges,
And the plume of the giant fern.

And ages had past, and ages,
When the winds scooped the deep sea-floor,
And the seas in their storm-blown rages
Tossed me to light once more.

And now, half a jest, it may be,
Half a charm, you hang in your mirth
Round the throat of the newborn baby
The oldest thing on earth!

AMONG THE STARS

In summer when the woods are green,
With meadow spaces in between,
With boughs that in the breezes toss,
With grass and leaves and vines and moss—
If, up in Venus or in Mars,
Some little child looks at the stars,
And one great Lamp swings out on high,
Like a live emerald, in the sky,
I wonder if she thinks, "How clear
The sweet Earth shines to-night, and near!"

In winter, when the snows have come,
And far and wide the ice-fields bloom,
And cloudless depths of perfect hue
Bathe all the world in blazing blue,
When gazing on her evening skies
That little child with happy eyes
Sees one great planet, bluer far
Than Lyra, a great sapphire star,
I wonder if, in such new birth,
She knows that Lamp is still the Earth!

THE LITTLE IRISH GIRL

While Nora ironed all day long,
Ruffling and fluting, folding fine,
Upon her smiling lips a song
Played as the wind plays in the vine.

The air was soft, the sky was blue,
Cool flowed the tide, the flowers were sweet,—
“Thought she of happier things to do,
Standing,” I asked, “on those tired feet?”

“Me grandmother, God rist her sowl!
(A dacint body,) ma’am,” she said,
“Followed one night an eery owl
That up and down the woodside led.

“And, suddint like, upon a glade
Beyond the bog, forninst the hill,
She saw the Fairy Coort displayed,
Drinkin’ an’ fastein’ wid a will.

“ ’Twas jewels like the twinklin’ drops
You see by starshine on the bog,
They had, an’ velvets like the tops
Of grane moss on the fallen log.

“ ’Twas crowns an’ plumes, an’ scarfs o’ gauze
They had, ’twas crystal vase an’ cup,
’Twas honey of the hips and haws,
An’ bees’ bread, for the bite an’ sup.

“Behint the thorn, through fleck an’ froth,
The bridles jangled on the horse,
An’ full on bit an’ saddle-cloth
The gowld was yellow as the gorse!

“They were the Fairy Folk, ochone,
Frighted my grandmother a pause,
A slip of a young thing alone,
The dacint body that she was!

“Ahl in a glitter was the quane,
Big mot’s there wor, an’ flyin’ flowers,
About her, little min in grane,
Pages like fireflies, ma’am, in showers.

“Me grandmother, she gave a cry,
The dear an’ pretty colleen bawn,
And in the shuttin’ of your eye
The little people ahl wor gone.

“Ahl, ma’am, exceptin’ that strange owl,—
And him, be just a looky chance,
She clapped her han’s on, the big fowl,
The same that lid her such a dance.

“Faith, how he flapped and flopped his wings!

An’ fine for ahl his turns an’ twists,
For ahl his fluster an’ his flings,
She hilt him fast in her two fists.

“ ‘Lave go, ye spalpeen, lave me go!

I am the Fairy Sentinel!’

He cried. ‘Before the cock shall crow
I have to be at Dhira’s Well!

“ ‘Tis ill-look for the likes o’ you,—

The speckle ’ran that ye do be!

To meddle wid the night-side crew—

I’ll cast ye in a spell!’ says he.

“He changed his chune. ‘Oh, av ye choose

To lave me go, cushla ma chree,

I’ll give ye what I’m like to lose,—

I’ll give ye Heart’s Contint!’ says he.

“Then the swate crathur, carin’ naught,

Loosened her han’s, an’ let him free,

And off he flew. ‘I never t’ought

To kape ye, sor, indade,’ said she.

“An’ heavy o’er the bog, an’ white,

He fled foreninst the dark o’ the wood;

An’ watchin’ him intil the night

Long, long, me small grandmother stood.

"An' home she wint. An' from that hour
'Twas swate to plant, 'twas swate to dig;
Betther than Innisfail's tall tower
She hilt her shealin' an' her pig.

"She had the smile for ahl that came,
Where'er she stepped she made it bright,
Whatever happened her that same
Was, more betoken, what was right.

"An' whin they laid her in her grave—
Sure, into heaven straight she wint!
She lift me ahl she had to lave,
She lift me, ma'am, her Heart's Contint.

"So though the sky be gray or blue,"
Said Nora, "light or long the stint,
I do the thing I have to do
Wid me grandmother's Heart's Contint!"

A L E G E N D

The little Christ-Child, with his tender feet,
His dear white feet, came down the dusty way;
Upon his lovely head the sunshine beat,
And shards and flints along the hill-side lay
Where other children kept their restless play;
And no one noted that where'er he stept
A tiny blood-red flower to blossom leapt.

And on his little shoulders lay a pair
Of fagots, whose loose withe had straightly
 slipped
And let them fall athwart each other there.
Low might the dove coo where the fig-tree
 dipped;
Soft be the shadows where the wild bee sipped;
Far off the olive in the south-wind toss;—
He bent beneath the likeness of a cross.

And as he came, the children on the road
Forsook their play, with many a birdlike cry,
And jeered him underneath his cruel load
As if a malefactor should pass by,
Some hill-born robber of the evil eye,
Aghast with horror now, with bated breath,
Bearing the twofold torment of his death.

And then the Christ-child, in that torrid place
Where sunbeams smote like swords, cast off the
wood,

And, as the drops fell from his sweet grave face,
A portent of the tree of bitter rood,
He set it on the earth whereby he stood,
And paused a moment, with a wildered look
To break the heart, before his way he took.

When, lo! a tremor struck the thing, a thrill
Whirled up the withered stem in rosy flame,
Green-garlanded and sweet it hung, until
A sudden storm of bloom about it came.
And as a flute might call the lads by name,
Their sport aside the dear Child bade them toss,
And rest beneath the shadow of his Cross.

A PROMISE

[Zech. VIII.: 5]

When I see at the floodtide of springtime
The sky with high lustre brimming,
And the little white clouds of heaven
On a happy west wind swimming;
And in all the streets of the city,
The morning about them delaying,
The fulness of life in their being,
The boys and girls singing and playing—

Then I hear an old verse in the Bible,
With its burden sweet and tender,
Where the Lord had promised the prophet
He would come again in his splendor;
And as though no joy could surpass it,
Exile and sorrow repaying,
That then all the streets of the city
Should be full of boys and girls playing!

THE KING'S DUST

Thou shalt die, the priest said to the king,
Thou shalt vanish like the leaves of spring,
Like the dust of any common thing
One day thou upon the winds shalt blow!
Nay, not so, the king said, I shall stay
While the great sun in the sky makes day,
Heaven and earth when I do pass away,
In my tomb I wait till all things go.

Then the king died. And with myrrh and nard,
Washed with palm wine, swathed in linen hard,
Bound in naptha-gum, and under guard
Of his mighty tomb they laid the king.
Century fled to century, still he lay
Whole as when they laid him first away,—
Sooth, the priest had nothing more to say,
He, it seemed, the king, knew everything.

One day armies with the tramp of doom
Overthrew the huge blocks of the tomb,
Arrowy sunbeams searched its chambered gloom,
Bedouins camped about the sand-blown spot.
Little Arabs, answering to their name,
With a broken mummy fed the flame,
Then a wind about the ashes came,
Stirred them lightly,—and the king was not!

LITTLE JANUARY

Who is the pretty fellow knocking, knocking,
Light as the tapping of the falling snow?
And why this other one with haste unlocking
The gate, in such a fluttering to go?

He cannot wait to see his rosy cousin,
Fur-wrapt, the snowflakes melting in his hair,
The gayest one of all the dear gay dozen
Who eagerly will cross the threshold there.

Come in, come in, then, laughing little fellow!
Quick! shut the door! the wind is blowing drear.
'Tis you, 'tis you, sweet lad, with locks of yellow,
With ruddy countenance and look of cheer!

The grass, the rose, the cherry, and the berry,
Let others bring; the frolic in the grove,
The bursting plum, the reddening leaf, the merry
Music of hayfield-ride and swimming-cove.

But *you* bring sleds, and snow-forts, joyous crying
From ice-boats sweeping on a straining sail,
Bring rushing benders on the ice, bring flying
On the toboggan like a comet's tail!

You bring the twilight bustle and glad scurry,
Where silence follows all the happy din,
To hear the story by the fire—O, hurry,
Dear Firstling of the year! come in, come in!

THE FORERUNNER

Heavily in his breast

The mariner's heart was beating;
Ever the course shaped west,
Ever the land retreating.

Mutiny muttering loud—

Naught all his hoping, his dreaming—
Suddenly out of a cloud
Wings were flashing and streaming!

Wings that told of the nest,

Told of the bough and the blossom;
Gave him the joy of his quest,
Kindled the heart in his bosom.

Promising land at last,

Circling over and under,
Fanning around his mast—
What was the bird, I wonder?

Nothing the Genoese cared

Were it or osprey or swallow—
The gray sea-waste was dared;
Palm-fringe and shore must follow.

Oh, when bleak skies break up
With winds the bluebird is whirled in,
I drink from the selfsame cup
The voyager pledged the world in!

For some of his joy must be
In the flash of the blithe new-comer,
Whose wing discovers to me
Whole continents of summer!

OUR MAYING

O bring my muff and mittens, Toots,
The ones I have for sleighing,
My thickest cloak, my stoutest boots,
For we will go a-Maying!

Where is my water-proof? oh dear,
Goloshes—always straying!
Where's my umbrella? Do you hear?
Now we will go a-Maying!

And have the gargles ready. Get
Hartshorn without delaying,
And ipecac and boneset,
When we come home from Maying!

A FISHING TRIP

What happy hours were those when Tom
And I, some monstrous whale to win,
Went fishing in the rocking-chair
Off the piazza with a pin!

Our sails were spread, our anchors weighed,
We were the captain and the crew,
Far out from land on chasing waves
Before the gale we rocked and flew.

Now schools of mackerel passed us by,
Now dolphins came in rainbow flocks,
Now, lifted on a distant wave,
A strange mermaiden combed her locks.

Cape Finisterre, and Baffin's Bay,
And Crusoe's Isle, and Red Sea shores,
We left behind, and saw ahead
Van Diemen's Land and the Azores.

We breakfasted in Behring Strait,
And then, for the sweet sake erewhile
Of Moses and the bulrushes,
We caught our dinner in the Nile.

ut for some reasons that we had,
Some memories of delightful scenes,
t nightfall we a harbor made
Always within the Phillipines!

Ve boxed the compass as we pleased,
The winds from every side were blown,
eography, and time, and space,
In that fine voyage were all our own.

ometimes the storms about us burst,
And we went slipping round the deck,
ometimes we rocked so near the edge
We narrowly escaped a wreck.

Far off we saw the huge whale spout
Just over the horizon's rim,
But though we sailed, and sailed, and sailed,
We never quite caught up with him.

And never shall we steal from time
Days half so glad as those wherein
Ve fished in the old rocking-chair
Off the piazza with a pin!

Who is there doubts the legend
That, on Midsummer's Day,
They whose eyes are touched with chrysm
See the fairies at their play—
Early in the rosy morning,
Late along the purple gloaming,
On the meadow-side, or shoreward
Riding foam-bows in the spray?

See Peasblossom gaily tilting,
With his wings shut on the stem—
Are those butterflies about him
Thinking he is one of them?
See fair Cobweb threading dew-drops
Up and down the wide red roses,
Dancing on her thread, and turning
Every dew-drop to a gem!

See them sliding down the sunbeams,
All the merry horde and bold,
In the tall St. Joseph lilies,
Slyly lifting heads of gold,
Swinging, singing, like the thrushes,
Merry tipplers at their revels,
With the toothsome horns of honey
That the honeysuckles hold!

See their rings in great white moonshine,
When the winds are up and away,
Like a cloud of blowing leaflets,
Like a mist-wreath, swirl and sway!
Suddenly the midnight tolling
Shuts the sight with sad enchantment,
And the hollow air is empty
'Till the next Midsummer's Day.

HER HOROSCOPE

That spell-bound day, when she was born,
The Signs' great mistress ruled the morn,
And asked of the powers of earth and air
What they would give to make her fair.

'Skin like my light,' said the moon, as she fled;
'I'll hide in her hair,' the sunshine said;
'Little white teeth like pearls,' said the sea;
Said the morning star, 'Leave her eyes to me.'

Answered the godmother, taking those,
'All very well, as far as it goes,
But still she'll need a trifle or two,
Our little maiden, before she'll do.'

'Well,' said the sea, 'if you must have more,
Suppose some day I should fling to shore
The wild free grace which far out and away
Wave tosses to wave in sun and spray?'

Sung the brook, as it babbled over the stones,
'You may put my music into her tones;'
Sighed the wind, 'From her temple only drop
One curl, there I'll flutter and never stop.'

'Let me give her brow,' said the twilight sky,
'I will fashion a forehead fair and high,
Fit to shelter pure thoughts and sweet'—
Said the earth, 'Let me make the way soft for her
feet.'

And the godmother, 'Thank you, a thousand
times!

Pleasant promises, tuneful as chimes—
We wouldn't be grasping—but then these things
Early or late will spread their wings.'

'Oh,' cried the deeps, 'Why didn't you say
You wanted a wingéd spirit in clay?
We can give her strength, till she mount and see
The beauty and awe in infinity.'

'Steadfast truth and sincerity,'
Said the noonday blue, 'she shall have from me;'
'I will make her heart for every guest
Warm with my sunset fires,' said the west.

Then a landscape lapped in azure haze
Where the southwind blows on autumn days,
Vowed on her future to employ
The depth of sorrow, the breadth of joy.

'I will wash her soul,' said the summer rain,
'Free forever from soil and stain;'

‘She shall have our innocence,’ said the snows;
‘My freshness,’ the dew on the wayside rose.

‘Wait,’ whispered the heavily-clustered vine,
‘She must surely have a gift of mine!
Spirit, or sweetness, or tendrils’ clasp
To those two little arms for a fervent grasp!’

And at that, the voices of every sprite
Proffered their treasures in sheer delight,
And no one could say who the givers were,
So happy the tumult, so glad the stir!

‘I,’ added at last the motherly earth,
‘Will make her the happiness of the hearth,
And if ever, grown weary, my rest she crave,
Some day the soft and forgetful grave.’

‘Hush!’ said the godmother. ‘Hush, I pray!
Such a blunder on such a day!
You always were an enormous clod—
Keep such presents under the sod!’

‘For she lives in the springtime, she moves in the
sun,
Smooth and bright shall her pathway run
As if, on the colors sacred and seven’—
‘It leads,’ said her Guardian Angel, ‘to Heaven!’

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY

If in the Flowery Kingdom you had happened to
be born,
Enough of flowers you might have—and every
flower a thorn;
You would not, light as thistle-down, this Fourth
of July morn,
Dance round with your torpedoes and your mellow
mimic horn;
For you would be, poor little maid, unused to go
alone,—
A prisoner whose bandaged feet no liberty have
known!

Oh, what is it floats above us, so dauntlessly on
high,
The sunset bars, the midnight stars, a glory in
the sky!
The winds are waiting on it, with rainbows,
storms, and showers,
And all the sunshine of the land pours through
this flag of ours!

And if, a darling of the sun, you first had seen
his ray
Where far in burning heavens shine the snows
of Himalay,

Where women waste their dreary lives and wear
the time away
In braiding jewels for their hair the livelong summer day,
Outdoors would be a fairy-land forbidden to your eye,
The slave of the zenana, within its walls to die.

And if you chanced to be the child of the Circasian hills,
Where the flute-player as he goes his wild sweet music spills,
One day the thought of wandering herds and leaping mountain rills
With longing that is but despair across your memory thrills,—
For the Turkish merchant lifts your veil and finds that you are fair;
And you go to the slave-market and the fate that meets you there.

And if where the Dark Continent its vast recesses hides,
Where to lose itself in deserts the mighty river slides,
Your home were in a wattled hut upon the jungle-sides—
See! a naked warrior with his spear across the thicket glides,

And tears you from your mother's arms, and
never heeds her wail,
To sell with gold and ivory where the slave-ship
drops her sail.

Or even if you had been born a week's sail o'er
the sea,
In that green isle from which the snakes were one
day forced to flee,
More like than not this sorry day an exile you
would be,
Or turned out of your cabin in the bog to sleep,
machree;
And you'd have no country of your own till you
crossed wild leagues of foam,
And church-steps in a foreign land would be your
only home.

But here you dance as light as if the wind's will
were your own,
Nor cramped your feet, nor dwarfed your soul
where this bright flag is blown!
No merchant weighs that heart of yours, as heavy
as a stone,
With silks and shawls; no fetter cuts your white
wrist to the bone;
But to blossom and to bourgeon here you are as
free as flowers.

While this cloud of blessing overhead distils its
heavenly powers!

Oh, what is it floats above us, so dauntlessly on
high,
The sunset bars, the midnight stars, a glory in
the sky!
The winds are waiting on it, with rainbow,
storms, and showers,
And all the sunshine of the land pours through
this flag of ours!

FLAG SONG

Out upon the four winds blow,
Tell the world your story;
Thrice in heart's blood dipped before
They called your name "Old Glory!"
Stream, "Old Glory," bear your stars
High among the seven;
Stream a watch-fire on the dark,
And make a sign in heaven!

Mighty harvests gild your plains,
Mighty rivers bear them,
Everywhere you fly you bid
All the hungry share them;
Blooms the wilderness for you,
Plenty follows after,
Underneath your shadow go
Peace and love and laughter.

When from sky to sky you float,
Far in wide savannas,
Vast horizons lost in light
Answer with hosannas.
Symbol of unmeasured power,
Blessed promise sealing,
All your hills are hills of God,
And all your founts are healing!

Still to those the wronged of earth
Sanctuary render;
For hope and home and heaven they see
Within your sacred splendor!
Stream, "Old Glory," bear your stars
High among the seven;
Stream a watch-fire on the dark,
And make a sign in heaven!

THE PROBLEM

Were Cupid a philosopher,
Were some sweet cherub capped and gowned
In scholars' robes, it would not be
Much stranger than it was to see
Our Baby in her problem bound,
Her doll forgot, her dear eyes wide,
Lost in the great thought she had found.

She knew not sages from of old
That self-same thought had puzzled on,
Asking a riddle none could spell,
Seeking an answer none could tell,
By night, by day, with faces wan,—
Where is to-morrow coming from,
And where 'tis yesterday has gone!

THE REASON WHY

Swift as flakes fall in orchard-blow,
The darling's kisses showered and sped;
And buried in the peach and snow,
The hugs, the smiles, the mother said,
"I wonder why you love me so!"

The darling made a moment's pause,
Her sweet eyes wandering everywhere
As if she questioned Heaven's great laws,
And then with the contented air
Of knowing all, she said, "Because!"

AN APPARITION

She saw, one day, a starry flower,
Born of the pleasant year's late hour,
Five-petalled, in the boulder's rift;
And then, with many a snowy shower,
A sudden storm swept down in power
And buried it beneath the drift.

She caught a melting flake of snow
That vanished. And she cried, "I know
The spirit of the flower was here,
It perished in the storm, and oh,
I think the flower was grieved to go,
It left upon my hand a tear!"

M E

Through many, many summers
I look, as through a glass,
And see a world of showers and flowers,
And laughing children pass,
And in her big blue sun-bonnet
One rosy little lass.

A lass who watched the swallows,
Skim just beyond her hand,
And where the flickers fled and sped
And nests of hang-birds fanned,
And felt those birds were fairy-folk
On wing to fairy-land.

In her warm fist she carried,
Trudging o'er hills and dales,
In tiny papers laid, and weighed
As if in fairy scales,
The salt that catches bobolinks
When sprinkled on their tails.

A little lass and wistful,
Who gazed up the blue sky,
And reached for fairy things and wings
In vain, and wondered why,—
Poor little lass, I wonder still
Could she be really I?

LOVE

"Shall I give your love to your mother?"

He said to the maid of three,
For her mother had gone to a country
Where presently he should be.

What calm in the eyes of azure,
What snow on the innocent brow,
How sweet was that voice of slow music,—
"My mother has my love now!"

UNDER GREEN BOUGHS

I heard along the orchard,
All in the bright spring weather,
The pink and pretty people
Whispering close together:

"We're drawing royal juices
From the happy earth's completeness,
From the perfumed showers of summer
And the spicy south wind's sweetness.

"We're wizards of the moonlight
Weaving charms with dewy plunder;
And we're chemists of the sunshine
Changing form and working wonder.

"When all the leaves have reddened
With streaks and peaks and dapples,
Though folk may think us blossoms,
They'll find we're really apples!"

ONE'S WILL

One day a little wave—indeed he wasn't naughty,
Though the others tried to hush and keep him
still,—

Said, "You mustn't think that I'm quarrelsome
or haughty,

But I want to be a rainbow, and I will!"

Then the sun came shining gladly, and the wind
came blowing madly,

And the little wave leaped up to catch the light;—

And for half a glorious minute, with only sunshine
in it,

He flashed in seven colors on the sight!

So when behind your task the harder ones come
trooping,

While the idle hours for only pleasure crave,

And o'er the humdrum work your heavy head is
drooping,

Just bethink you of that rainbow and that wave!

NEXT THE HEAD

I

Such a dear, but such a dunce,
Was the rosy little lass,
Perfectly content to be
At the foot of her small class!

Once we promised she should have
Almost anything she would
On the day when she could say
She above the others stood.

Naught she seemed to heed the wish,
Loitering on the school-ward way,
Never glancing in her book,
All absorbed in endless play.

Judge then our surprise at last,
Each day slipping like a bead,
When she carelessly remarked
Next the head she stood, indeed.

Next the head! Enough! Enough!
She should choose that afternoon
From the dolls that moved their eyes,
Said 'mamma,' and sang a tune.

Who, it happened then, we asked
In our scholar's class might be—
O the innocent blue eyes!
"Rosy Grey," she said, "and me."

II

Sorrows sore our little lass
Felt each day in spelling class;
Never could she go above
Rosy, or for gold or love.

Though she studied might and main,
Rosy twice as hard again
Studied, and, the lesson said,
Kept her old place at the head.

But one day, at last, she came
Running with her face aflame.
She the Rubicon had passed,
She was at the head at last!

What delight! what pride! We said,
"Are you really at the head?"
"Yes, oh yes," she cried in glee,
"Rosy stayed at home, you see!"

THANKS

Sweet was the candy-drop I gave,
Sweet was the little maiden, too,
Made out of rose-leaves certainly,
With more or less of honey-dew.

“What do you say?” her mother asked,
Whispering the little lesson o’er,
“I dess I say,” the dear one piped,
All silver soft, “Dot any more?”

TWO GENERATIONS

"I want a bigger piece of pie!"

The boy of long-ago contended.

"It's real nice! You've given him

Just twice as much! This pie is splendid!

"That's a right-angle you gave him,

And an acute to me,—how spiteful!"

To-day's boy clamors. "For the pie,

Though quite unwholesome, is delightful!"

WHAT ONE BOY THINKS

A stitch is always dropping in the everlasting
knitting,
And the needles that I've threaded, no, you
couldn't count to-day;
And I've hunted for the glasses till I thought my
head was splitting,
When there upon her forehead as calm as clocks
they lay.

I've read to her till I was hoarse, the Psalms and
the Epistles,
When the other boys were burning tar-barrels
down the street;
And I've stayed and learned my verses when I
heard their willow whistles,
And I've staid and said my chapter with fire in
both my feet.

And I've had to walk beside her when she went
to evening meeting,
When I wanted to be racing, to be kicking, to be
off;
And I've waited, while she gave the folks a word
or two of greeting,
First on one foot and the other, and 'most stran-
gled with a cough.

"You can talk of Young America," I say, "till
you are scarlet,
It's Old America that has the inside of the
track!"

Then she raps me with her thimble and calls me
a young varlet,
And then she looks so woe-begone I have to take
it back.

But! There always is a peppermint or a penny
in her pocket—

There never was a pocket that was half so big
and deep—

And she lets the candle in my room burn 'way
down to the socket,

While she tews and putters round about till I
am sound asleep.

There's always somebody at home when every one
is scattering;

She spreads the jam upon your bread in a way to
make you grow;

She always takes a fellow's side when every one
is battering;

And when I tear my jacket I know just where to
go!

And when I've been in swimming after father said
I shouldn't,
And mother has her slipper off, according to the
rule,
It sounds as sweet as silver, the voice that says,
"I wouldn't;
The boy that won't go swimming such a day would
be a fool!"

Sometimes there's something in her voice as if
she gave a blessing,
And I look at her a moment and I keep still as a
mouse—
And who she is by this time there is no need of
guessing,
For there's nothing like a grandmother to have
about the house!

FERN SEED

Longing for such delightful play,
She dropped her precious book, and mused
On that strange fern-seed fairies used
That they might pass, in the old day,
Invisibly upon their way.

She knew, of course, without a doubt,
That fern-seed made a mortal so
That he could come and he could go
Invisible to all about,
And no one ever find him out.

What pleasure she would take, for one,
That fern-seed found, she thought and sighed,—
Curls in a tangle, shoes untied,
The baby fretting for some fun,
Lessons unlearned, and sums undone!

What made her start then, who can tell,
And think what pleasure she might take,
Were there some fern-seed that could make,
By any sort of fairy spell,
Our faults invisible as well?

A BICYCLE SONG

Light upon the pedal,
Firm upon the seat,
Fortune's wheel in fetters
Fast beneath our feet,
Leave the clouds behind us,
Split the wind we meet,
Swift, oh swift and silent
Rolling down the street!
When the dark comes, twinkling
Like fireflies in the wheat,
Bells before us tinkling
Fairily and feat,
Slide like apparitions
Where the dusk is sweet,
Swift, oh swift and silent
Rolling down the street!
Horses in the desert
Maybe fly as fleet,
Northern lights in heaven,
Sparkles on the sleet,
Swift, oh swift and silent,
Just before we meet
The outer edge of nothing
Turn rolling up the street!

ON THE TROLLEY

The red is melting in the river,
The red is dying in the sky,
The evening star begins to quiver,
Belated birds go darting by,
Come, let us follow, follow, follow,
And find how fine it is to fly!

By pine-woods where, when noon was sunny,
The air with spicy balsams flowed,
By gardens full of sweets and honey,
Where summer-long the rose has glowed,
By weary wife and loitering lover,
Come, flash along the river-road.

The forest wall across the river
Darkens within the curling tide,
The fragrant winds about us shiver,
We rock, we race, we rush, we ride,
Thrilled with the sweep of airy motion
And glad because the world is wide!

The night soars up the purple spaces,
The whirling winds divide the deep,
Strange gleams are on familiar places,
Swift lightnings underneath us leap,
As forward flying, flying, flying,
Upon the thunderbolt we sweep!

THE GINGERBREAD VINE

Oh, do you know, and do you know,
The vine where risen doughnuts grow,
And in a shower come tumbling down,
All sugary and crisp and brown?

And did you ever chance to taste
The plum-cakes going there to waste?
And reaching o'er the fence, perhaps
A stem just strung with ginger-snaps?

The house stands close beside the street;
Around its roof the branches meet.
If you look up, about your head
Fall down great squares of gingerbread.

Once when I went inside the door,
Through the wide window to the floor
A bough came bending all apart,
And tossed me in a jelly tart.

Whoever lives there, I must say,
Though he is lame and old and gray,
What a rare gardener and fine,
And, oh, how happy with that vine!

My mother says that very few
Gingerbread-vines she ever knew,
And none shook down, it seems to her,
Like this, an apple turnover.

Some days it drops upon the ground,
Soft, soft, a frosted heart and round,
And sometimes, when the branches stir,
Such cookies rain as never were.

And you can guess—oh, you can guess—
That if 'tis too far at recess,
Yet all the children, as a rule,
Go slow there coming home from school.

THE SCHOOL MISTRESS

She spoke in Latin, wrote in Greek, and knew
the Hebrew points,
She told the names of all the stars, and how their
orbits ran,
In his presence wired a skeleton together by the
joints,
“I do’ no’ about this ’ere,” said the school-com-
mittee-man.

She told him half the history of half the human
race,
And how the world had been if made on any other
plan,
“You better stop jes’ where you be—don’t nohow
fit the place,—
You ain’t no idee of grammar,” said the school-
committee-man.

THE LAZY HOUR

So bright are the branches,
The shadows so cool,
So dark is the water,
So deep is the pool,
So hard is the lesson,
So hot is the school—
If I were the son of a merman
I never should hear of a rule!

Light as the arrow
Springs from the bow,
Off the big ledges
Down I should go,
Into the hollow
Whose secret I know,
Up I should come like a bubble,
Shake off the water and blow!

Now for a breast-stroke
Under the tide,
Arm o'er arm sweeping
I float on my side,
Deep in green crystal
Slowly I slide—
There goes the class up in Cæsar—
I wish I'd a corner to hide!

THE BELLS OF SEPTEMBER

Over the round earth comes swinging,
Chiming and rhyming and strong,
Something like wonderful singing,
Singing of wonderful song.

From land to land now it goes beating,
Beating from mountain to glen,
From seacoast to prairie 'tis fleeting,
From prairie to seacoast again.

The little lad hears it, and straightway
He tucks his book under his arm,
The little lass runs through the gateway
To answer its joyous alarm.

Out of the east it comes swimming,
This sound like a wonderful song,
With murmur of melody brimming,
Hear it, ding-dong, now, ding-dong!

Oh, what shall we have to remember,
In the long days from New Year to Yule,
So sweet as the bells of September,
The world over, ringing in school!

THE FAIRY OF EARLY FALL

If on the path, without a word of warning,
A web of lace, with silver meshes hoary
And sparks of fire, lies any shining morning,
What Fairy, you will ask, has wrought this
glory?

Is that the old elm tossing like a fountain
Its golden shower against the blue of heaven?
Is that the forest stretching up the mountain,
Or some great rainbow with the colors seven?

And where the clematis had climbed the cedar,
Is that indeed the very Witch of Endor?
And has there been no eye at all to heed her
Turning the dogwood's poison into splendor?

Whose are the dripping fingers that have done it,
Painted the maple-leaf a scarlet wonder,
Who pinched the plum and breathed the bloom
upon it,
And burst the chestnut's chrysalis asunder?

Who is it, wrapped in violet veils and gauzes,
To see this world that late was all so sober,
In midmost of her magic turns and pauses?
I think the Fairy's name must be October.

IN NUTTING TIME

Rollicking, frolicking,
Up the hill,
Chattering, clattering,
Nobody still,
Clipping and slipping,
Fast and slow,
Hustling and bustling
To and fro,
Into the nut-glades
See them go!
Battering, scattering,
Big burs down,
Rambling, scrambling,—
Nuts are brown,—
Flurrying, worrying,
Clouds are low,—
Curling and swirling,
Wild winds blow,—
Out of the nut-glades,
See them go!
Whisking and frisking,
Jacket and gown,
Trippingly, skippingly,
Never a frown,
Hurrying, scurrying,
Back to town!

P U S S

The hero of a hundred fights,
He bore his scars about of nights,
Reproaches to those luckless wights
Who had not fought a hundred fights.

His great green eyes alarmed his foes
With splendor; curdling blood they froze
With their live emeralds, when he rose
And laid about him mighty blows.

O'er his war-harness, grim and dire,
A mantle worth a captain's hire
He trailed; and in his dreadful ire
Its very fur struck sparks of fire.

He went on raids throughout the land;
He dared the cats on every hand
Up to the scratch. The craven band
Bit dust before his champion brand.

What rat but quaked when he drew near?
What caitiff mouse refused him cheer?
What clarion-call could give him fear
Who cut the comb of chanticleer?

His battle-cry's resounding din
Taught music to the violin;
And, to wind-shaken harp-strings kin,
His purr the listening ear would win.

He was a knight without a flaw;
In him both court and camp one saw;
For, bowing to the fireside law,
What other ever gave his paw?

But, jealous of his wide renown,
Fate sent a monster thundering down,
As erst some dragon raised his crown,
Beleaguering an ancient town.

Its solid tread shook all the ground;
It scattered flames of fury round;
Puss felt the heart within him bound
To measure swords with this Mahound.

He gazed. He sprang with valor hot—
Turn, turn!—nor view the fated spot!
For what was Puss? Oh, fearful lot!
A twisted tail, some hair, a blot!

THE SOLEMN TRUTH

Said Phosphor unto Lucifer—those cats of high degree!

Phosphor, the saffron-tinted, just a golden fleece was he,

And when he sighed in reverie you really would declare

That he was full of fiddle-strings which played some cat-land air;

And Lucifer, that lordly cat, was black as blackest night,

With eyes like yellow jewels, great gleaming balls of light.

A Greek was Phosphor, scholars thought who chanced to hear him mew,

But Lucifer knew Latin, and, they said, black magic, too!—

Said Phosphor then to Lucifer: "It really would appear

Cats are the most important things upon this mundane sphere.

Look at the way that we are lodged, and all this loving fuss;

There is no doubt this house is kept for us, and only us.

This is our drawing-room; these chairs, these
lounges low and soft,
We've slept in every one of them full many a time
and oft.
These paintings, these old chinas, this glass, these
flowers, these books,
They make the place agreeable about our cozy
nooks.
The rug upon the hearth is ours, for us the fire
burns red,
And we have the kindest gentleman to wait on
us to bed.
The silver in the buffet shines to stir our loving-
cup,
The table laid, the pretty maid cutting our tidbits
up,
For Jane and Katy only live to serve us it would
seem,
And Michael only milks the cows to bring our
daily cream.
The peacock, whose great purple sail the garden
walk illumines,
Was surely hatched for us to pounce and play
about his plumes;
And that garden, with its vases, too, and over-
flowing flowers
That keep the catnip company (which certainly
is ours)—

To say that it was made at all for any one but
us,

With all its cherry-trees and birds, would be
preposterous.

While these ladies, who about us shower so lavish
a caress,

They are our dames-in-waiting, and we their
happiness.

And sometimes in the twilight when the strain of
some old song

Miss Fanny plays, or Katharine whirls the spin-
ning song' along,

And the mouse is singing in the wall, and the
winds upon their flight,

I think that maybe music was just made for our
delight."

Said Phosphor unto Lucifer, "Now don't you think
I'm right?"

And he, that silent knight-at-arms, in league with
unknown things,

To whom the salamander in the coals strange
secrets sings,

The fluorescence of whose eyes once awed Egyptian
kings,

That wild shy sprite round whom a cloak of
wizard mystery clings,

That has familiars in the night as far as Saturn's
rings,
That creature of such mighty springs you might
believe that he had wings,
That prince of all the powers of air, that shining
Lucifer,
That black-silk-satin-velvet cat just winked, and
answered, "Purr!"

THE MALISON

There were not in our English tongue
Words quite half bad enough to say
What feelings swelled in Hugo's heart
Toward Mabel on that dreadful day.

The books of that scholastic house
Fluttered their pages, all awake;
The black tide in the inkstands stood
Trembling before the storm should break.

To see the angry cherub then,
With fallen pen the father turned,
Murmuring the old surprise that such
Wrath in celestial bosoms burned.

All the air listened; dark the room
As if before some gypsy's curse;
While Hugo wildly, swiftly sought
Which malediction was the worse.

The dimples deepening into frowns,
Fire flashing from those eyes of blue,
Clinching both little fists, he cried,
"Oh, you—you—you *bad grammar*, you!"

THE CHILD THAT GAVE TROUBLE

A tease for a kiss, for a story, a song,
You must make her a doll, you must blow her a
bubble,
She was under your heels almost all the day long,
She was climbing and falling, and bumping and
bawling,
And crying and calling, the child that gave
trouble.

She was sliding down-stairs with a shout and a
shock,
Flying all ways at once till you thought you saw
double,
She was filling the vase, she was winding the
clock,
She was slopping and slipping, and running and
skipping,
And dancing and tripping, the child that gave
trouble.

If the water was running, the bath-room afloat,
If the fence was afire, and was burning like stub-
ble,
If the rope had been cut of the leaky old boat,

That down-stream was trailing with weeping and
wailing,
You knew without failing 'twas the child that
gave trouble.

That was she if the croup gave a gasp in the
night,
It was hers if a forehead was bruised on the rubble,
It was hers, too, the clamor that filled you with
fright,
And she talked till you maddened, and cried till
you saddened
And laughed till you gladdened, the child that
gave trouble.

How still is the house now, how darkling the
hearth,
O what is our joy for that breaks like a bubble!
Is there pleasure or music so sweet on the earth
As the voice that once gushed so, the face that once
flushed so,
The child that we hushed so, the child that gave
trouble!

HER WINGS

What made any of us love her, who can say?
Just a piece of winsome mischief all the day,
Flittering, fluttering, like a rose-leaf here and
there,
Reedy voice, and tangled sunshine in her hair.

One day, when her sins were many—of their
kind—

Clambering down the well, fairyland to find,
Tossing, for a lesson, puss into the brier,
Mocking the sweet mocking-bird an octave higher,

On her dimpled shoulder then I laid a hand,
“Angels up in Heaven have wings, you understand,
But,” I said, “we have to start them here, you
know;

Isn't it quite time that your wings began to
grow?

“They grow best when we live as the angels do,
Loving duty, loving everybody, too;
You're so tall now—yes, indeed—if you had
wings,
They would start just here, I think, the lovely
things!”

Then I took that hand of hers and passed it down
Where the little shoulder-blade escaped the gown,
“Let me see—why, what is this? Now you don’t
believe—

Can a wing have started just behind your sleeve?”

Stretching back and feeling, with many a grim-
ace—

What a gladsome wonder settled on her face!
“Will they be like real angel’s wings?” she said,
“Reaching to my feet and up above my head?”

“Real angel wings, when grown, will your wings
be!”

Circling as a bird does, full of whistling glee,
“Oh! my wings are growing!” she sang as off she
flew;

“I will love the neighbors just as I love you!”

But how often after that I had to say
Whether everything was going the right way,
“Really,” said I, “don’t you think they’ve grown,
yourself?”

“Oh, I’ve tried to be so good!” replied the elf.

Then we questioned of their color when complete,
Those great plumes that stretched along from
head to feet;
Should they be the tint of violet's purple grain
Where the sunshine through them takes a royal
stain?

Should they be a yellow, like the primrose bloom
Opening with the evening star in twilight gloom?
Azure, like the baby's eyes in morning glow?
"Oh, the sky's so blue," she said, "they wouldn't
show!"

"Mine," said I, at last, "shall be a flush of rose
Burning at the very ends to dazzling snows."
"Mine shall be," she said, "when in Heaven I
wake,
Just the color that it pleases God to make."

What a heart-break haunts remembrance of that
day!
Ah, what idle words, those colors and that play!
Silver gray as doves, or white beyond the moon,
I had not dreamed that she would wear those
wings so soon!

THE WITCH-DANCE

When from the underworld the light
Shot through the dead and flying leaves
I saw a witch-dance, where the corn
Stood stacked in half a hundred sheaves.

Their tatters streaming on the wind,
They bowed, they bent, they turned, they tost;
They trembled with an aguish chill,
Withered and shrivelled in the frost.

Nodding in rhythmic time and tune,
What unsung staves perchance they heard,
What strange phrase muttered, all the while
With wild and silent laughter stirred!

When happily a hurrying troop,
As if one wound some fairy horn,
Out of the shadow rose, and then
Went dancing with the stooks of corn.

Each little figure waved her scarf,
A score of airy fairy flags;
Each corn-stook curtsied, turn by turn,
Rustling her old and silken rags.

They capered here, they capered there,
Balanced to partners, tripped and twirled,
Now stately as a saraband,
Now a mad tarantella whirled.

So dark, so weird, so mocking these,
Things out of eld,—so sweet, so dear,
So innocent, the fairy folk,
One shivered half to see them near!

When suddenly the last light fell,
A sad wind moaned through sighing sheaves,
The witch-dance vanished,—homeward came
The children scuffling through the leaves.

THE LAND OF STORY BOOKS

The moment she blows out the light,
And all is dark and cool about,
And through the window quickly peers
A great star sparkling in and out,
By foaming brooks and mossy nooks,
I find the land of Story Books.

Blowing his horn, I hear Boy Blue,
With Bobby Shafto go to sea,
Taste of Jack Horner's pie, and dance
O'er London Bridge with Lady Lee,
With Jack and Jill go up the hill,
While wandering at my pleasant will.

I tremble with Red Riding Hood,
I dance with Cinderella there,
And from the silver basin sip
With Beauty and the little bear.
I visit Kings and courts and things
With seven-league boots as good as wings.

Harry and Lucy go with me,
Rollo, and boys and girls a troop,
Sindbad the Sailor follows us
When in Aladdin's cave we stoop,
And, sometimes then we, little men,
See dear Hans Christian Andersen.

Sweet princesses in lonely towers
We rescue, and huge dragons pass,
Through many a maze of marvels go
With Alice in the Looking Glass,
With Mowgli keep the jungle deep,
With Toomai through the forest sweep.

And sinking into downy clouds
Strange seems the Pilgrim going by
With Great Heart, strange seems Crusoe's face,
And strange the Land of Nod should lie
With hushing brooks and pillowed nooks
So near the land of Story Books.

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THE THANKSGIVING TREE

Of all the lovely trees that grow,
The Christmas tree's the best, you know;
But next to that, you must agree,
Comes really the Thanksgiving tree.
You never heard of it? Why, dear,
It spreads its branches every year,
And it must have a mighty root
To bear such quantities of fruit.

What sort of fruit? Why, crisp and brown,
It sends a fine roast turkey down—
Wish-bone for me, drumstick for you—
And raisins in the stuffing, too!
And ducks, with jelly, cuddled close
In parsley; and along with those,
A ham all stuck with cloves, and, high
With flaky crust, a chicken-pie.

And then all sorts of other things,
A garden full, the great tree brings—
Sweet cider, barbary-jam that quakes
Like melted rubies till it breaks;
And celery, 'most as good, I guess,
As manna in the wilderness;
And Chili sauce and pickled limes,
That we can't have at other times.

But grandma says, "Take all you will;
There's one day you shall have your fill."

And apple-pies, and squash, and mince—
The citron cut as thick as quince—
And plums as big as plums can be,
Grow on this good Thanksgiving tree;
And oranges that last a week;
Pears, red and yellow on the cheek;
And where the lower branches lean,
You'll find each nut a philopene.
And better still, this tree bears cousins
You never heard of by the dozens,
And aunts and uncles; blindman's-buff—
I tell you what, it bears enough!
And next day, after all the toil,
It usually bears castor-oil.

It's strange that you should never know
How such a wonder came to grow!
Planted in younger soil, indeed,
It sprung from the old roof-tree seed;
And though it flourishes the best
In this great region of the West,
Yet one much like it over-sea
They call the Old Mahogany Tree.

A STRANGE COUNTRY

I wonder what the children do, in those old
countries far away,

Where, let them have what else they will they
never have Thanksgiving Day!

Have they no green goose over there, no sage, nor
thyme, that you can learn,

No chickens in a fricassee, no ducks just roasted
to a turn?

Have they, poor things, no cranberry swamp, no
celery-trench, no pumpkin-vine,

Nothing for tart or turnover, nor just one sip
of currant wine?

No pudding, in its blue flames wrapped, to fill
them with delightful fear,

No raisin-bunches, no white grapes, none of the
good things we have here?

Have they no grandmamas, indeed, with all
these dainties on the shelf,

To welcome them in that old home where mother
likes to go herself?

No great brown garret full of glooms, to peer
around with half-scared joy,

With shadows in the corners still of father when
he was a boy?

Morning at meeting, after dark oysters to roast
and nuts to crack,—

Here we should think the world had stopped if
the great day did not come back!

With nothing to be thankful for, is there no
heaven up that way?

What a strange country it must be where there
is no Thanksgiving Day!

IN ICY WEATHER

There's a pleasant sound of bell-tones, gently
growing, far off flowing,
Of rain upon the roof, like the pattering feet of
mice;
Of harp-strings in the casement where the wind
is lightly blowing—
But there's no such music anywhere as the skates
make on the ice!

A-ringing and a-singing while you're heeling,
while you're wheeling,
A-humming and a-thrumming and a-drumming
in a trice;
A-chinking and a-clinking when the outer roll
you're reeling;
Oh, there's no such music anywhere as the skates
make on the ice!

A-chiming and a-rhyming, one stroke springing,
one stroke swinging,
A-jangling and a-twangling, whirling, twirling,
twice and thrice,
A-chaffing and a-laughing all along your airy
winging,—
Oh, there's no such music anywhere as the skates
make on the ice!

THE SNOW FLURRY

Dazzle of airy nothings
Drifting in wind-blown showers,
Pendulous fine prefigure,
Dance of the unborn flowers,
Flying, frolicking, falling,
Whirling afar and near,
Tossed on the pane and melting
Into a broken tear,
The sombre fir-tree wreathing,
Gone in a hurrying breath,
Kissing the lip and swiftly
Passing to vaporous death;
Only a dazzle of nothings
Lost in ethereal play,—
But crystalline, radiant, stellar,—
The worlds are made that way!

JO'S TOBOGGAN

Wait a moment; careful—steady—
Take your breath. All right?
Good-by, earth and trudging people,
We are off for flight!

Hearts, for half a slipping second
Sunk in chill and fear,
Kindle with the joy of fleetness,
Answer cheer with cheer!

See the hillside falling from us—
Up in a balloon!
See slide down the sky beside us
The little yellow moon!

If the earth had any edges
We should soon be there,
Cold and sweet and dark and headlong
Bounding through the air!

All alive the winds go by us,
Whistling wild and far;
Tell me, now, is this a comet
Or a shooting-star?

THE YULE-LOG'S SONG

High in the mountains where we went
To have our Christmas among the snows,
The far white slopes stretched up the sky
Where the young moon sank and the great stars
rose;

And with every gust of the long slow wind
The forests of fir from root to crown
Made murmuring music, and softly shook
A cloud of sifted silver down.
But round the hearth of the room within,
Like the cherub throng of some heavenly choir,
The children clustered, and held their breath
While their father lighted the yule-log fire.

The little flames crackled and crisped and curled,
And sweet were the cries from the happy crew,
As higher and higher the blue smoke twirled,
And then what a blaze the great log threw,
What a glory swept up the chimney shaft,
And vanished into the vast night-blue!
And the rafters started out of the gloom
With all their festooning apple-strings,
With the silver skin of their onion-stalks,
Their crook-necked squash, and their herby
things.

And the gleam glanced high on the powder-horn,
And the king's-arm flung back a startled light,

And the face of the clock was like the moon
Red in the mists of the August night,
While all the depth of the dusky room
Was full of the firelight's blush and bloom.

The grandame's hair like the aureole
Of any saint in a picture showed
And a wreath of roses about her there
The frolicking children's faces glowed.
Thank God for Christmas!" the father said,
And the mother, dropping her needles, turned,
"Thank God for Christmas, for roof, for fire!"
She answered him, and the yule-log burned.

On roared the billowy flames; the sparks
In shining showers up the darkness whirled;
And the sap on the great ends stood like beads,
And bubbled and simmered and hummed and
purred,

And its thin note quavered and swelled and sighed
And tuned and twittered and rippled along.

"The worm is dying," the children cried,
"Oh, hush!" said the grandame; "you do it
wrong,—"

And they bent to listen, all eager-eyed,—
"Hush, 'tis the yule-log singing his song!"
And the place with a sudden warble rang,
And this is the song the yule-log sang:

“Far in forest glades I grew,
Fed on draughts of noontide dew;
Passed the spotted snake’s low lair,
Passed the browsing of the bear,
Fresher branches thrust each year,
Passed the antler of the deer,
Till space and sun and solitude
Made me king of all the wood.

“Then, my lower branches laid
In a mighty depth of shade,
Glad my tops the sun descried
Coursing up the great earth’s side,
Knew the cloud’s phantasmal forms,
Wrestled with a thousand storms,
Proudly bore victorious scars,
And measured lances with the stars!

“Twice a hundred years the snow
Her white and glimmering veils did throw
Round me; moonbeams touched my spires
With a light of frosty fires;
Knee-deep in the summer fern
Twice a hundred years return,
And into leaf my full plumes burst
Green as when they bourgeoned first.

"Spices of the sun-soaked wood
Rose about me where I stood;
Gums their richest resin cast
On every wind that wandered past;
Blossoms shed their petals sweet
In balmy drifts about my feet;
Berried fragrance filled the gloom,
And the wild grape's ambrosial bloom.

"Here the bee went blundering by
Honey-drunk, the butterfly
Flittered,—ah, what songs I heard
Shrilling from the building bird!
How all little life did house
Securely in my sheltering boughs
That drew the green walls close when there
The great hawk hung in upper air!

"Still the dawn, the star-flame old,
That steeped me through and through, I hold,
The gladness wrought in every root
While the wood-thrush blew his flute,
And music ordering all my art
With sorrow fit to break the heart
When the summer night was still
And far off mourned the whippoorwill.

“Now, my wealth of centuried hours,—
Memory of summer showers,
Bloom and song and leaf and wing,—
Upon this yule-tide hearth I fling.
All the life that filled my year
I give back to the Giver here,
Burning gladly in His name
The hoarded sunshine of my flame!”

And the children listened, but all was still;
A core of heat was the yule-log's heart,
And into the ashes the live coals dropped
Like rubies that flash and break apart;
And the shadows skimmed up the darkening wall,
And the wind brought a clamor of music near,
And the stars themselves bent down to hear,
While out in the valley far below
The peal of the Christmas-bells rang clear.

A CHRISTMAS STORY

Around the hearth, just after dark,
The sailor's little children cluster,
Looking far up the chimney flue,
Where great clouds stream and great winds
bluster.

This is the night when overhead,
His reindeer prancing, bounding, neighing,
Loaded with toys, St. Nicholas
Across the frosty sky goes sleighing.

And bent to catch him as he flees
Just o'er the chimney-top careering,
And beg of him the thing they wish,
The children eagerly are peering.

For black with night and bright with foam
The winds and waters wildly wrestle,
And like white wings of birds their thoughts
Go fluttering round their father's vessel.

And they would have the good saint haste
Where mighty seas are shouldering, pressing,
And, while their father keeps the deck,
Shower down on him some choicest blessing.

In that old sea-blown house where waits
From dawn till dark a patient mother,
The father's cheer upon the sea
Is gift enough, they ask no other.

Now, in their fancy, up the flue,
They hear far off the sleigh-bells jingle—
Now downcast and dispirited,
They only see stars swarm and tingle.

When suddenly the door flies wide,
A rush of snowy air blows o'er them—
Is it the good St. Nicholas?
Is it their father stands before them?

Wrapped in his strong and tender arms
They listen to the wild sea-story,
The black cat slumbers on the hearth,
The fire burns soft, the ash falls hoary.

They hardly hear the Christmas bells,
The breath upon their lips suspended,
They see the fight with storm and wreck,
No hero's deeds a whit more splendid!

The mother smiling on them all,
The father turning fear to folly—
In any palace of the land
Can Christmas eve be half so jolly?

CHRISTMAS CHEER

Three hundred years ago or so,
The best that could be had for gold,
To set before a queen herself,
Might make a carving knife run cold:
A peacock stripped and roasted! Then
Served in its feathered skin and crest,
And glorious in the amethyst,
Emerald and sapphire of its breast;
With curving throat of azure lights,
And in its gilded beak a flame,
Held high by some fair lady's hand,
On a great silver dish it came.

And Cleopatra's purple sail
Was duller than that streaming tail,
For my part, when the bird was fit,
I wonder how she lifted it!

Talk of the good old times! Just think
Of all the feathers and the fuss!
The times we have are best of all,—
The best is good enough for us!
Look at this Phoenix, crackling hot,
The stem of parsley on its breast;

From last year's ashes here again,—
And never mind the peacock's crest!
What will I have? An outside bit
Whose praises epicures may sing,
The wish-bone, thank you, or perhaps
The luscious picking of a wing.

Come, let a royal feast begin
When mother brings the turkey in,
For all their crests and peacocks, too,
I wouldn't change with them, would you?

A CHRISTMAS LULLABY

Sleep, dear, sleep, where nothing ill is,
Let no joy-bells, ringing in the morrow,
Give your happy dreams a thought's surcease,
Screened from all the world of wrong and sorrow
By the lilies
Of your purity and peace.

Sleep, and only hear in dreaming
Far-off music, beating, fleeting,—
Never lullaby so sweet and blest,—
Christmas-bells the heavenly song repeating,
Softly seeming
Angels singing you to deeper rest.

Sleep, love, while the gracious story
Of another child the bells are telling
Whose dear hand is holding yours to-night,
The sweet Christ-child bending from the dwelling
Where His glory
Fills the heavens themselves with tender light.

Sleep,—the Christ-child keeps the skies above you,
Stills the song upon your dream intruding,
Folds around you slumber's silent fleece,
Fills the mother-heart about you brooding,
So doth love you,
That he lends his purity and peace.

THE FOSSIL RAINDROPS

Over the quarry the children went rambling,
Hunting for stones to skip,
Into the clefts and the crevices scrambling,
Searching the quarrymen's chip.

Sweet were their voices and gay was their
laughter,
That holiday afternoon,
One tumbled down and the rest tumbled after,
All of them singing one tune.

Here was a stone would skip like a bubble,
Once were it loosed from its place,—
See what strange lines, all aslant, all a-trouble,
Covered over its face.

Half for a moment their wonder is smitten,
Nor divine they at all
That soft earth it was when those slant lines
were written
By the rain's gusty fall.

Nor guess they, while pausing to look at it
plainly,

The least in the world perplexed,
That the page which old Merlin studied vainly
Had never such wizard text.

Only a stone o'er the placid pool throwing,
Ah—— But it told them, though,
How the rain was falling, the wind was blowing,
Ten thousand years ago!

WINGS

"Oh, I am dying, dying!" said the worm.

"I feel thick darkness closing o'er my eye;
All things fall from me with my breaking sheath,
Good-by, sweet leaf! Oh, dear, green world,
good-by."

Then the dull mask that had enclosed him fell
Still further. Oh, what lofty space, what light!
And, all about, what happy hovering things
Like blossom petals that had taken flight!

And fluttering stretching on the air he spread
Great gauzy wings that let the sunshine
through;

Forgot that he had ever been a worm.

And far off in the strange new depths he flew.

BIRDS AND BONNETS

Last year I heard the yellow-bird
Whirr and whistle, warble, whistle,
Swinging, clinging, always singing,
Singing on his purple thistle.
Last year I saw the yellow-bird,,
All black and gold, a flame of fire,
Dart up and down o'er brake and brier
And catch his spray and flute and whistle,
Singing, clinging, always singing,
Swinging on his purple thistle.

When skies were dull, I saw the gull
Soaring, sailing, swirling, sailing,
Skimming, swimming, where the brimming,
Brimming wave made stormy wailing.
Last year I saw the shining gull,
Half wing, half wave, flash through the foam,
And gray and silver up the dome
Of gray and silver skies go sailing,
Skimming, swimming, where the brimming,
Brimming wave made stormy wailing.
Last year, methinks, the bobolinks
Nestled gladly, hovered gladly,
Doubling, troubling, always bubbling,
Bubbling, rapturously, madly.
Last year, methinks, the bobolinks

Filled the low fields with vagrant tune,
The sweetest songs of sweetest June—
Wild spurts of frolic, always gladly,
Bubbling, doubling, brightly troubling,
Bubbling rapturously, madly.

And last year, too, the blue-bird flew—
What had April been without him!
Winging, springing, always flinging,
Flinging music all about him.
A bit of heaven itself he flew
When earth seemed heaven with bees, and bloom,
Southwind, and sunshine, and perfume,
And morning were not morn without him,
Winging, springing, always flinging,
Flinging music all about him.

Were it last year, I still might hear
Veery, blackbird, pipe together,
Trilling, shrilling, song-bursts spilling,
Spilling song in every weather.
Still I the whippoorwill might hear
Flown o'er dark woods and lonesome lakes,
And hush! the thrush, from covert breaks,
A white soul and the dusk together,
Trilling, thrilling, song-bursts spilling,
Spilling song in every weather.

But no birds now stir any bough—
Bent and darkling, blown and darkling—
Waking, waking, wet wings shaking,
Shaking stars and dew to sparkling.
From no green depths, from no green bough,
Half in doubt, and half in dreaming,
Shall I hear the bird-song streaming,
With wings and cries and star-beams darkling,
Waking morn itself, and breaking,
Breaking, into rosy sparkling.

And shall June be as fair to me,
Gone the singing, hushed the singing,
Brightness, slightness, darting lightness,
Lightness gone and no woods ringing?
Shall songless June be sweet to me?
Shall silent morn and tuneless night?
And skies with no wings' arrowy flight?
The opening rose and no bird singing?
Brightness, slightness, darting lightness,
Lightness gone and no woods ringing?

Who robbed my June of all its tune,
Nests a-twitter, wings a-flitter?
Killing, chilling, who was willing,
Willing June should be so bitter?
Who has a soul so out of tune
With busy joy, and glancing flight,
And love, and song, and life, and light,

With nests a-twitter, wings a-flitter?
Killing, chilling, who was willing,
Willing June should be so bitter?

Lo, the maiden, trophy-laden!
Sheen and color, life and color,
Ended, so the maid be splendid!
Splendid she though woods be duller.
She with swift and swallow laden,
And things that once were wingéd words
Of music, vibrant humming-birds
In mail of rubies—sheen and color
Ended, so the maid be splendid!
Splendid she though woods be duller!

Though fair the face and laughing grace
With wing of tern or plume of plover,
Yet rarer, fairer, should the wearer
Fairer mercy once discover!
No charm for me attends that face,
I see no beauty round that head—
I see the blood-stains harsh and red!
Sorrow and silence round her hover!
And rarer, fairer, were the wearer
Unbanned by every wild-wood lover!

IN AN OLD GARDEN

Come down to that old garden
Of every flower we knew
When out of gates of childhood
The airs of morning blew,
And arching heaven was painted
In every drop of dew.

And you may have the lily
With all her virgin snows,
And you may have the beauty
That blushes on the rose,
But I will have the heartsease—
The dearest flower that blows!

Who will shall have the balsams
And store of hydromel,
The purple of the monkshood
With poison in his spell,
Who will shall have Sweet William
And the Canterbury Bell.

I love the breath of rosemary,
The perfume of the stock,
The proud plumes of the fleur-de-lis,
The silken hollyhock,
I love the flaming poppy
And the sleepy four o'clock.

But they say that when great angels
Fell plunging from Heaven's frown,
A spirit looking after
Lost a blossom from her crown,—
I know it was the heartsease
Came softly floating down.

O bright the honeysuckle,
And sweet his tippling crew,
The bird-wings of the columbine,
The larkspur blue as blue—
But I will take the heartsease
And all the rest take you!

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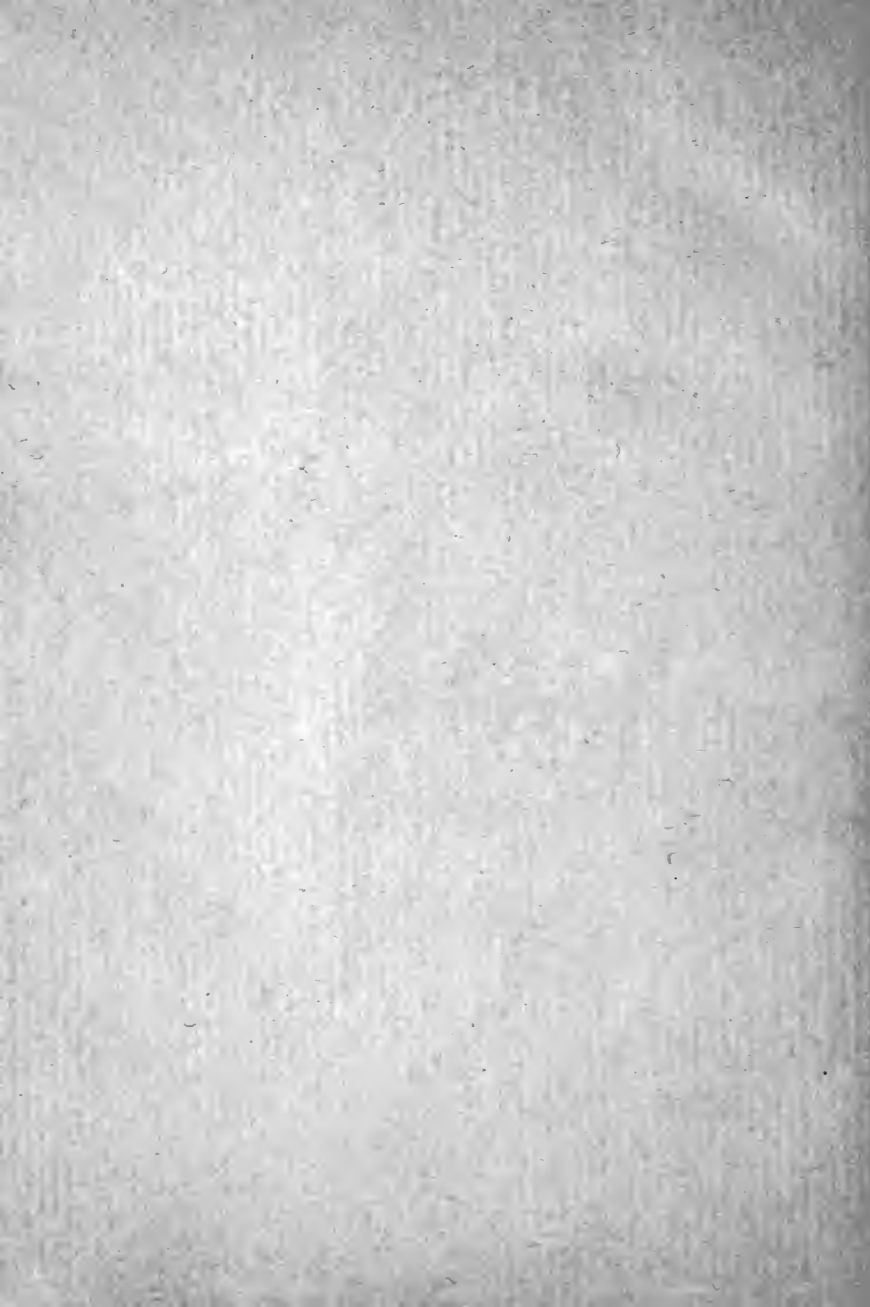
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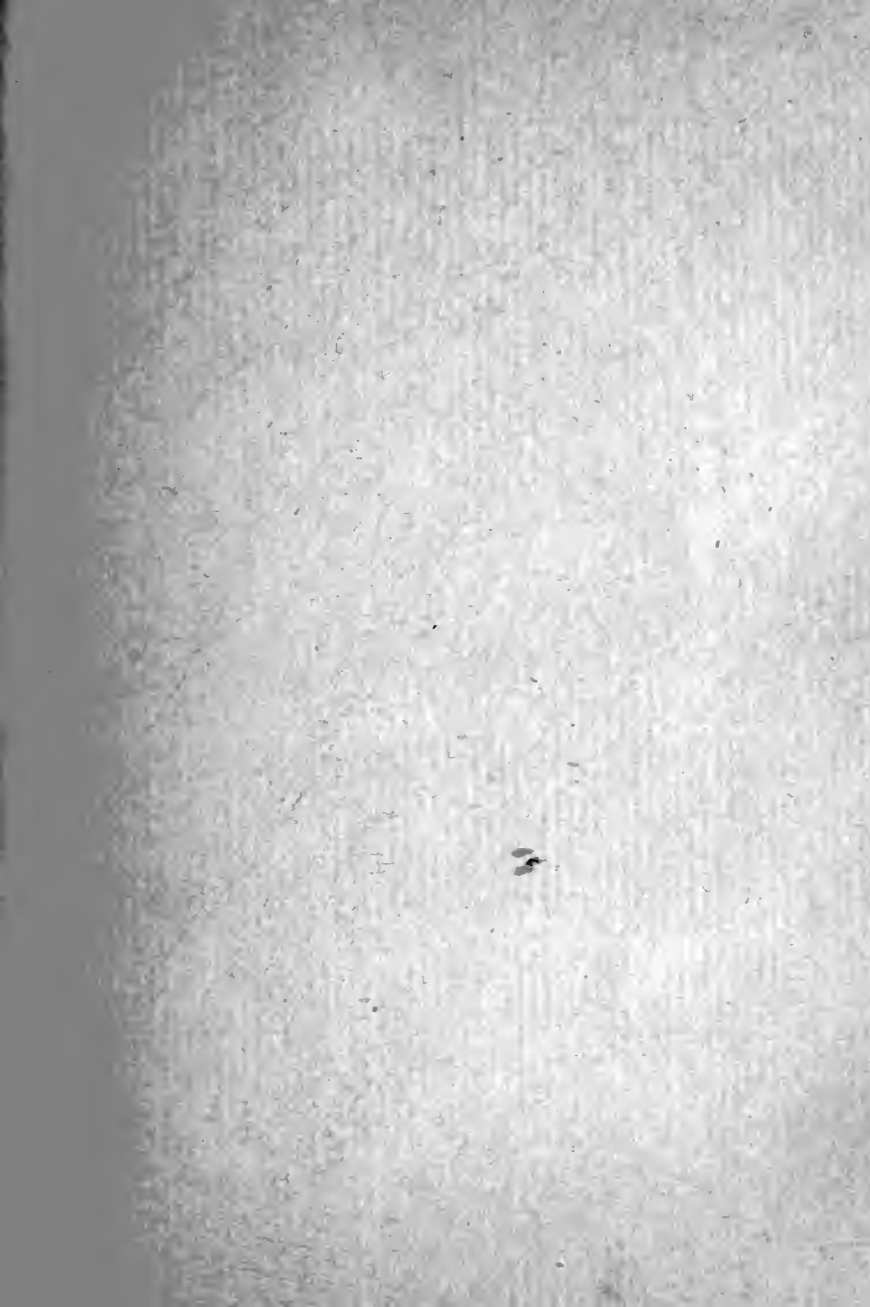
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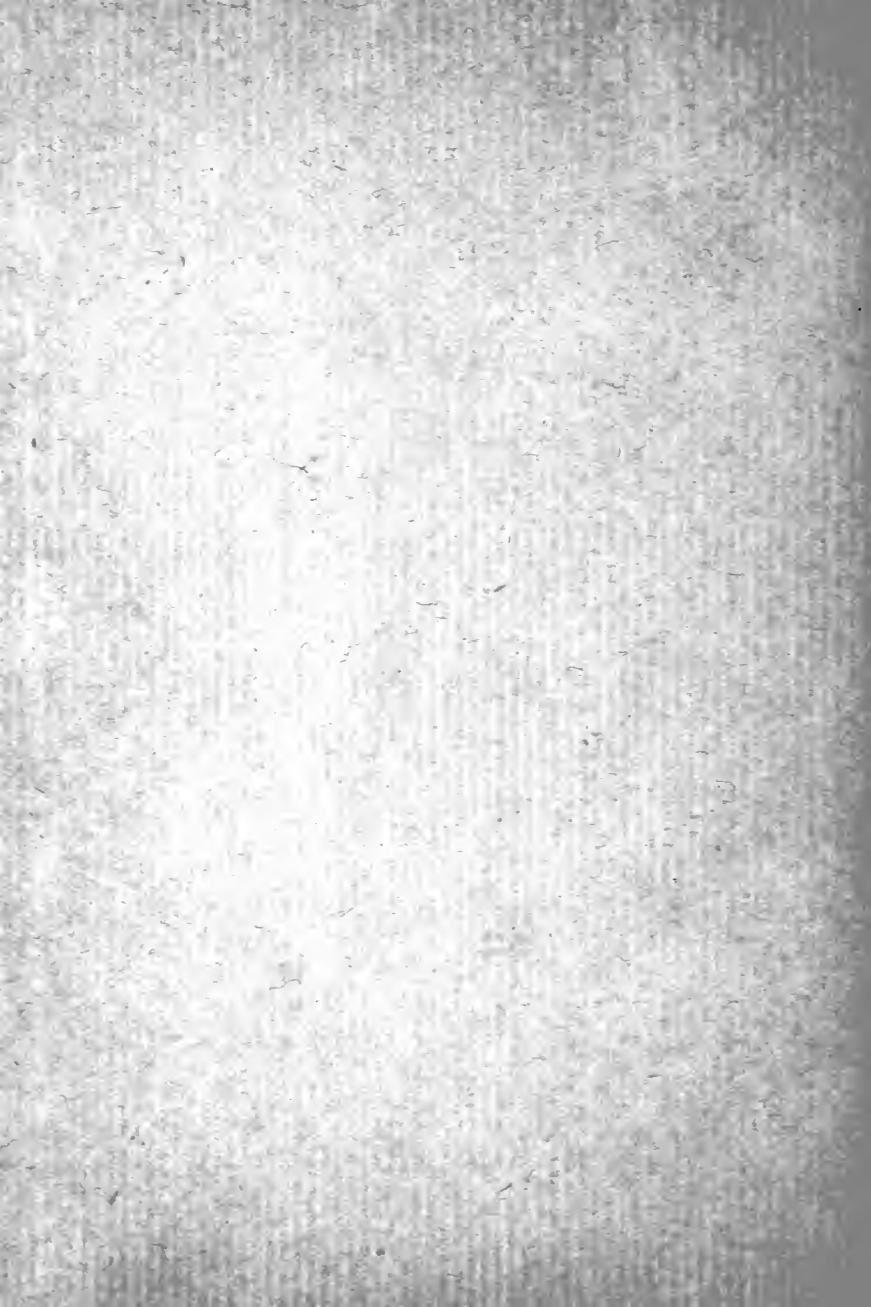
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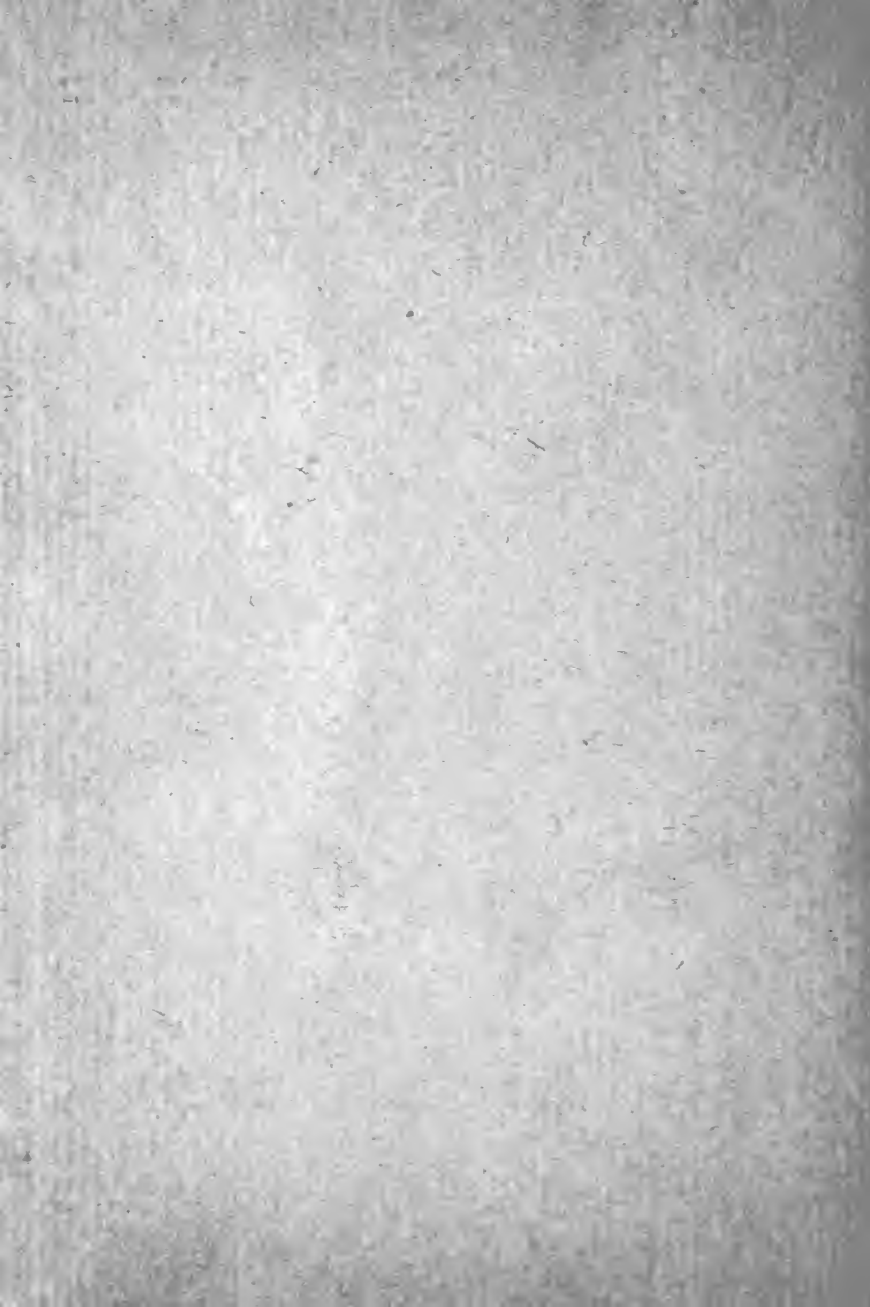
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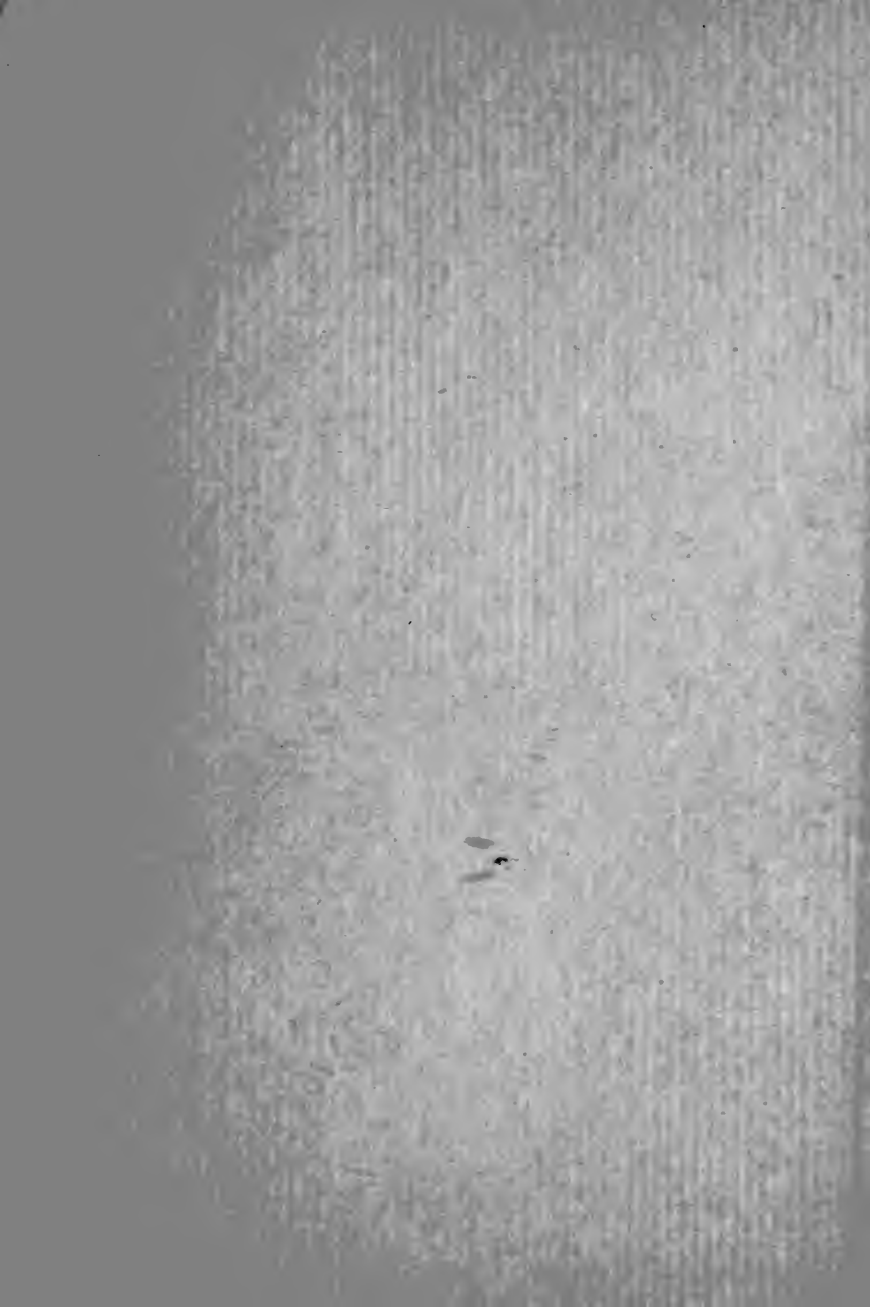
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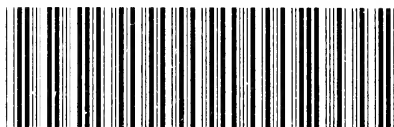
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